



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: January 1 to March 31, 2005

**WEST BANK AND GAZA: International Observation of Voter Registration (04859)
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-00004-00**

**Project dates: September 1, 2004 to September 30, 2005
Total budget: \$200,000.00 Expenses to date: \$137,041.83**

I. SUMMARY

Due to concerns about the quality and accuracy of the civil registry developed in preparation for the 1996 elections, the Palestinian Central Election Commission (CEC) decided to create an entirely new voter list. On September 4, 2004 the CEC began registering voters in more than 1,000 centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The voter registration period, scheduled to run from September 4, 2004 to October 7, 2004, was initially extended for one additional week. NDI released a preliminary statement on this process on October 7, 2004.

Following Yasser Arafat's death and the announcement that presidential elections were to be held, the CEC reopened voter registration on November 24 for eight days to accommodate voters wishing to register for the upcoming election. Following the registration process, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) passed an amendment to the electoral law requiring the CEC to permit unregistered eligible voters to vote provided their names appear in the civil registry. In late December, CEC staff began door-to-door canvassing in Jerusalem to register eligible voters. The CEC has also indicated it will reopen the voter registration process prior to the PLC elections, scheduled for July 17, 2005.

This quarter NDI began drafting an interim report on the voter registration process to be submitted next quarter. The Institute also requested a no-cost extension for the program in order to conduct physical tests of the list after it is finalized and to write a final report assessing the voter registration process as a whole.

II. BACKGROUND

Due to concerns about the quality and accuracy of the civil registry developed in preparation for the 1996 elections, the CEC decided to create an entirely new voter list. On September 4, 2004 the CEC began registering voters in more than 1000 centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The voter registration period, scheduled to run from September 4, 2004 to October 7, 2004, was initially extended for one additional week. Throughout the five-week registration period political challenges, with origins in both Israeli and Palestinian politics, appeared to overshadow any technical difficulties.

No agreement was reached between the Palestinians and Israelis regarding the registration of voters in Jerusalem and on September 13, the Acting Israeli Minister for Internal Security Gideon Ezra ordered the CEC to close all voter registration centers in the geographic area considered by Israel to be within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, a total of six centers.

According to the CEC, 1,111,868 people, 67 percent of the estimated number of eligible voters, registered in more than 1,000 centers throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the five week registration period. Nineteen thousand names were subsequently removed from the voters' list, decreasing the number of registered voters to 1,092,856. Forty-six percent of registrants were female.

Following Arafat's death and the announcement that presidential elections were to be held, the CEC reopened voter registration on November 24 for eight days to accommodate voters wishing to register for the upcoming election. The exhibition and challenge period, during which voters had the opportunity to modify incorrect or missing information regarding their own registration or challenge the eligibility of others who appear on the list, was held from December 2-6.

Following the registration process, the PLC passed an amendment to the electoral law requiring the CEC to permit unregistered eligible voters to vote provided their names appear in the civil registry. In accordance with this legal mandate, the CEC decided to establish 66 special polling centers where those who only appear on the civil registry may vote. The CEC cross checked names on the civil registry with those on the newly created voter registry in order to remove names appearing on both lists. In late December, CEC staff began door-to-door canvassing in Jerusalem to register eligible voters.

The CEC has indicated it will reopen the voter registration process prior to the PLC elections, scheduled for July 17, 2005.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

NDI has begun drafting an interim report on the voter registration process this quarter.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The following achievements can be cited toward the two objectives of this program:

- Demonstrate international support for, and interest in, the electoral process in the West Bank and Gaza through the deployment of international monitors to assess and report on the critical voter registration period, thereby promoting confidence in the integrity of the process to the degree warranted.
- Strengthen the electoral process by identifying real or potential problems in the voter registration system and offering recommendations to the CEC.

NDI has been drafting an interim report on the voter registration process this quarter.

V. EVALUATION

NDI is currently working on an interim report assessing voter registration activities to date.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- An interim report on NDI's observation of the Palestinian voter registration process will be submitted next quarter.
- Phase three of the program, during which NDI will conduct physical tests of the final voter list, has been delayed due to recent changes in the voter list mandated by the PLC. After NDI receives the final list from the CEC, the Institute will conduct the physical tests of the list and write a final report assessing the voter registration process as a whole.